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# Review of *Language, space, and social relationships*

posted February 27th, 2012

**Language, space, and social relationships:** A foundational cultural model in Polynesia. By **Giovanni Bennardo**. (Language culture and cognition 9.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. 371. ISBN [9780521883122](#). \$144.

Reviewed by [Muhammad Aurang Zeb Mughal](#), *University of Durham*

In this book, Giovanni Bennardo explains the foundational cultural model of the cognitive aspects of language and socio-spatial organization in Polynesia, which is based on fieldwork having been carried out in the Kingdom of Tonga. Not only about the linguistic anthropology and the cultural model of space in Tonga, the book is also a rich description of Tongan culture, the human-nature relationship, power hierarchies, and interpersonal and social relationships.

In the first two chapters, to introduce cultural-linguistic characteristics of Tonga, B describes the linguistic and cognitive uniqueness of the Tongan language when compared with the English language. B compares some of the conceptual analyses of spatial preposition from his earlier works on English with the Tongan language. Comparison of the cognitive aspects of two languages of fairly remote cultures is a task to be handled with care, which the author was able to do successfully with his personal command of the Tongan language and his ability to accurately portray cultural context through detailed ethnographic analysis.

The book is divided into three sections with three chapters in the first two sections and four in the third. The first section explains the concept of space in the Tongan language, cognition, and culture. Discussing the rootedness of language and culture in the human mind, this book deals with topics such as how Tongans perceive space and how their social relationships are shaped by their perception of space. Some of the cognitive data was collected using frame-of-reference tasks, through which B elaborates on the cognitive dimensions of space as they are expressed in language and represented in Tongan culture. The second section deals with the foundational cultural model, 'radiality'. B explains radiality as a structural organization and a 'preferred mental organization of knowledge', in which relationships are defined through a 'point in the field of ego'. B stresses that since the mental construction is essentially spatial, there is a need to study the cognitive aspects of social relationships through radiality, which he discusses further in the third section. In the

third and final section radiality is explained with respect to speech and mental representations in social networks and social relationships.

B has furnished this book with rich linguistic and cognitive data along with a detailed explanation of methodology, which will help other researchers to apply and test the methods in different settings. Free listing, frame-of-reference tasks, memory tasks, pile sorting, discourse structure and metaphor analysis, and cognitive mapping are some of the techniques used innovatively by B to express the cognitive framework of spatial organization in Tongan language and culture. These methodologies fit very well into B's architectural and computational approach to cognition.

Due to its detailed analysis of cognitive models and theories, the book can serve well as a textbook and as useful reading for advanced-level students in cognitive anthropology, cognitive linguistics, and linguistic psychology. Although the book is not primarily written for geographers, many human geographers, those interested in psychology, and linguists with geographic interests will find this book particularly interesting. Although the language used in the book is clear and straightforward, technical terms from cognitive psychology and linguistics may make the book's complicated ideas difficult for general readers, who are not the intended audience, to grasp.

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